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## **RUN URGES SENATE TO PASS AMENDED HIGHER EDUCATION BILL BEFORE CHRISTMAS TO BENEFIT REGIONAL STUDENTS**

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) urges the Senate to pass the Higher Education and Research Amendment Bill with key changes to benefit regional students prior to Christmas. The Chair of RUN, Professor Peter Lee, said that it was time to end the uncertainty around the higher education reforms.

“A new approach to university funding is needed to maintain the quality education that students expect. The changes to the bill supported by RUN will help regional students attend and succeed at regional universities and will increase the number of professionals working in regional Australia,” Professor Lee said.

“Despite the scare campaign, we do not believe that \$100,000 degrees will be a reality in the regions.

“The changes RUN is advocating to the bill will put downward pressure on university fees and add to the affordability of higher education for students.

“The extension of the demand driven funding to diploma, advanced diploma and associate degree courses proposed under the bill will provide more opportunities for regional students. Sub-bachelor degrees are a useful first step into higher education for those who are not well prepared for university study.

“RUN supports reducing the proposed 20 per cent cut to university funding and establishing an ongoing Competitive Regions Fund that addresses the thin markets of low population density and demand in regional Australia.

“The bond rate should not be applied to student loans. RUN suggests that the loan rate be set at 50 per cent of the Long Term Bond Rate, with the students’ interest rate on the loan capped at a maximum of 4 per cent.

“Such a measure would add further impetus to the affordability of Higher Education for all students.

“Scholarships, which give students the choice of studying at regional universities if they so wish, will also make university study more affordable.

“RUN advocates for regional scholarships funded by Government or pooling the proposed Commonwealth Scholarships to provide regional universities with more scholarship funding than they would receive under the original proposal. It is important to encourage students to study in regional Australia so that they will work in the regions. The decision to study at

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a particular university should be at the choice of the student, not because one university or another can offer large scholarships.

“RUN also advocates imposing a threshold on the Higher Education Participation Program to ensure that funding is allocated to those universities with relatively high proportions and significant catchments of low SES students. This will also put downward pressure on fees and assist in the crucial task of lifting participation in higher education in the regions,” Professor Lee said.

“Senators can help regional students by adopting these changes and passing the amended bill prior to Christmas.”

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